

## - Breast feeding

### Eating tips for nursing mums

#### Nutritionist Nurul Zaiza Zainuddin shares insights on how to eat right for your baby

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IF you are a nursing mother, you can definitely benefit from eating a balanced diet to help maintain sufficient energy for your body and to provide nutrients for your baby. However, with so many food choices, how do you know what should go into your diet and what should not?

To get some tips on picking the right nutritious food and what constitutes a balanced meal, we approached the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Division's Senior Assistant Director Nurul Zaiza Zainuddin to share her advice for breastfeeding mothers. Nurul Zaiza has given talks on nutrition, the importance of eating a balanced meal, the right food to eat, and how it relates to women's health.

"The best way to obtain energy and nutrients is to follow the Malaysian Food Pyramid 2020. It comprises five food categories such as vegetables, fruits, grain and grain product, lean meat and legumes, and milk and dairy products," explained Nurul Zaiza.

"Breastfeeding mothers need to eat food from each of these groups every day, and should try to have a varied diet by mixing and matching, per taste preferences, [to include] different food types, texture, colour and cooking method."

What advice would you give to first-time mothers?

"First-time mothers need to educate themselves with the right sources of information on healthy eating in order to have a successful breastfeeding journey.

"Women need to know that in order to achieve this, they must get sufficient energy and proper nutrient intake by eating healthy and having a balanced meal, daily.

"Mothers need to be healthy and fit first, in order that they can care for and nurse their children. Healthy mothers raise healthy children."

What are the important nutrients for a nursing mother and her child?

"Pregnant women and post-partum mothers (the first six months, after delivery) require a significant addition of certain nutrients which is required for the growth of a baby in the womb, and they must also begin to prepare psychologically for the start of the breastfeeding phase right after delivery.

"For example, a mother requires more energy and as such, to cater to the higher level of energy increase, add another 80kcal (calories) for the first trimester of pregnancy, 280 kcal in the second trimester, and 470kcal in the third trimester.

"After delivery, mothers will need to add an extra 500kcal calories for the first six months, exclusively for breastfeeding. Mothers are advised to add more Protein, Vitamin A, iodine, folate, iron, and zinc, among others, to increase energy levels during this period.

"It is important that the requirement for nutrients should be met through a healthy diet. As such, it's advisable to use Pinggan Sihat Malaysia #suksukuseparuh as a guide to planning the main meal consisting of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then, add healthy snacking in between main meals.

"Healthy snacking should consist of lean meat, vegetables, fruits, complex carbohydrate, dairy products, legumes, and others.

"Choose nutrient-dense food as snacks in order to provide extra energy and nutrients."

What foods should be avoided?

"Foods pass through the breastmilk and can affect the health of the baby. The consumption of caffeinated drinks or food containing caffeine should not exceed 300mg every day for breastfeeding mothers. Caffeine level varies according to the ingredients.

"For example, an average estimation of 1 cup (8oz/230ml) of coffee contains 80-100mg of caffeine, 1 cup of tea contains about 80-100mg of caffeine, 1 can of energy drink contains about 80-250mg of caffeine and carbonated drinks at about 20-30mg of caffeine.

"Breastfeeding mothers should be cautious about consuming caffeine because not only could it disrupt micronutrient absorption in the body (which is vital in the breastfeeding phase) but it could pass to the baby through breastmilk.

"This will increase the risk of the baby feeling discomfort, restlessness, irritability, and cause sleeping problems.

"Breastfeeding mothers should also avoid alcohol and excessive use of unregulated herbal and traditional supplements as it has the potential to pass into breast milk and might harm the health of a baby.

“Highly processed and sugary foods also should be avoided because they have fewer nutrients, high in calories and is less beneficial to both mother and baby.”

Do mothers need to take supplements or vitamins while breastfeeding?

“As breastfeeding mothers’ nutritional requirements can be fulfilled through a wellbalanced diet, a healthy mother does not need to take extra supplements or vitamins.

“However, if they have certain conditions or diseases, then they should consult with their doctor before taking the supplements.”

How does a vegan or vegetarian diet affect breast milk?

“Based on current evidence, this type of diet does not significantly change the breastmilk composition compared to a normal diet, as long as they have proper nourishment and adequate energy level and nutrient intake.

“However, there is a slight exception for certain micronutrients, fatty acids, and primarily, vitamin B12.

“Therefore, it is advisable for vegans or vegetarians to know their individual nutritional status and discuss with their doctor and nutritionist if they plan to breastfeed.

“They need to give special attention to how to compensate for this nutrient gap, whether to get it from a certain type of plant or supplements.”

How can mothers maintain a well-balanced diet and allocate time to prepare food, while also caring for a child?

“It is understandably a great challenge for women to manage caring for a child and at the same time needing to be the gatekeeper of healthy eating practices in the family.

“Therefore, it is important from the very beginning of planning to have a child, that a woman must communicate with her partner on choosing a healthy lifestyle – including healthy eating practices – as a way of life together.

“By having the same aspiration, it will be less of a burden and instead become a great way of bonding to plan and prepare a well-balanced diet for the whole family through each phase, starting with planning to get pregnant (preconception), pregnancy, breastfeeding and with complementary feeding practices for the child at six months old and beyond.

“The basic tips are to plan at least a [weekly] menu and to include varieties of food, colour, texture, and healthy methods of cooking when planning your menu.

“Make sure you always have salad in your fridge if you are too busy to cook vegetables. If you are having salad, you can skip cooking one meal and you need to focus only on your protein dishes, whether to add fish, chicken, or meat to your salad.

“Another option is to try one-pot-meal dishes that include vegetables and a protein of your choice. Nevertheless, you always have to try to find a simple yet nutritious snack such as milk, salads, fruits, dried fruits and nuts and cooked legumes such as chickpeas.

“You can always opt for fresh food because it is rich in nutrients, which is important for all breastfeeding mothers.”